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ABSTRACT

This coordinator's handbook describes the "Rockin' Readers" program, in which senior-citizen volunteers are matched with specifically targeted at-risk children (usually of kindergarten age or slightly older) in Alachua County, Florida, who tested below their peer group in language development and reading readiness skills. The handbook notes that each volunteer reads aloud to the same child weekly, sharing the love of stories and an awareness of reading with that child. After a brief description of the benefits of reading aloud to children, the handbook presents a program overview; steps for program set-up; lists of duties and responsibilities of volunteers, coordinators, and teachers; selection criteria for students; recruitment ideas; training guidelines; recognition; trouble shooting; and program evaluation. Contains 14 references and 10 notes. Sample forms, handouts, and drawings are attached. (RS)

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ROCKIN' READERS



Coordinator Handbook

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*You may have tangible wealth untold:
Caskets of jewels and coffers of gold.
Richer than I you can never be—
I had a mother who read to me.*

— Strickland Gillilan

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School Board of Alachua County, Florida

Rockin' Readers Coordinator Handbook

Produced through an Enhancement Grant
from the Florida Department of Education
Office of Business & Citizen Partnerships

Alachua County School Volunteer Program
620 East University Avenue
Gainesville, Florida 32601

INTRODUCTION

*"Reading is probably the most widely used of all the processes of gaining knowledge. For this reason, reading is of vital importance to the learner, and it needs to be a pleasant and positive experience. If the child's early memories of reading are happy, he or she will want them to be repeated. This association will strengthen the inner drive to read and learn."*¹

The Rockin' Readers program was developed in the Alachua County, Florida, school system in response to a request from kindergarten teachers for volunteer assistance for children who were deficient in language development and pre-reading skills. The teachers suspected that many of these children had not experienced the joy of regular one-to-one reading with a caring adult. In response to their concerns, the Alachua County School Volunteer Program initiated the Rockin' Readers project in which senior citizen volunteers were matched with specifically targeted at-risk children who tested below their peer group in language development and reading readiness skills. Each volunteer read aloud to the same child weekly, sharing the love of stories and an awareness of reading with that child. The goal of the project was for the child to demonstrate increased language and pre-reading skills, as well as enhanced self-esteem and emotional maturity.

The pilot project was so successful that in 1991, an Enhancement Grant from the Office of Business and Citizen Partnerships in the Florida Department of Education was awarded to Alachua County to expand the program and develop training materials which could be used in other school systems. This coordinator's handbook and the accompanying volunteer's handbook have been designed to assist you in implementing this program in your school or district. Rockin' Readers is a rewarding program which is well received by the children, the teachers, and the volunteers.

WHY READ ALoud

According to the Report of the Commission on Reading (1985), "the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children."² "Children who learn to read are ones who have been read to as young children."³ The most significant factor in determining a child's success in reading is how much that child has been read to by siblings, parents, or other caring adults.⁴ Whether a child is a reader or non-reader is not determined by race, ethnicity, socioeconomic level, nor I.Q.; the differences stem from being read to and having access to print.⁵

The benefits of reading aloud to children are numerous. Steven Silvern, for example, found that reading to children increases their reading achievement, listening and speaking abilities, vocabulary, ability to recognize letters and symbols, ability to use more complex sentences and overall concept development.⁶ In addition to these academic benefits, they also get a great deal of emotional satisfaction from the read-aloud experience.⁷ Children are given an adult's total attention and have opportunities to interact with an adult in a warm, supportive and nonthreatening setting. As a result, they associate reading with positive feelings and look forward to the opportunity to experience those feelings again. They feel better about themselves, recognizing that someone considers they are important enough to take twenty minutes to read a book just to them.

Although the research indicates that children who come from homes that value reading and who have been read to from an early age are generally the best readers,⁸ it also indicates that it is not too late to begin exposing children to stories and reading at school.⁹ There is just no substitute for reading one-on-one with an accomplished reader.¹⁰

- Suzanne Colvin, Ph.D.,
Supervisor, Early Childhood Education
Alachua County Public Schools

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Description

Selected students in pre-kindergarten through grade two will meet weekly on a one-to-one basis with volunteers who will read stories to them in an instructional, caring, and supportive manner.

Objective

The purpose of the Rockin' Readers project is to help young children acquire the skills needed for learning to read, to foster in them an appreciation of literature and a love for reading, and to help them develop self-esteem and emotional maturity through a nurturing relationship.

Manpower

Volunteers will be recruited to volunteer on a weekly basis for one or two hours as a Rockin' Reader in a school. A school could have many volunteers assigned to this project reporting during the course of a week. Each volunteer will have assigned students to whom he/she will read each week. Volunteers who choose to do so may volunteer more than once a week.

Materials

The Rockin' Readers are responsible for selecting the books to be read to the children. Arrangements should be made with the school media center for books to be checked out by these volunteers. In addition, volunteers are encouraged to use the public library for book selection. An area in the school should be designated for the reading sessions and a rocking chair provided, if possible.

School-Based Coordinator

Each school will designate a school-based coordinator who will be responsible for general program management and the assigning of volunteers to students in the program. This coordinator could be the curriculum resource teacher, the primary specialist, the media specialist, the guidance counselor, or the school volunteer coordinator.

STEPS FOR PROGRAM SET-UP

Before setting up a Rockin' Reader program in a school, the principal should choose a school-based coordinator for the program. This coordinator is critical to the success of the program. The coordinator should be knowledgeable about reading to young children and be well acquainted with the pre-K through second grade teachers at the school. The primary specialist, the media specialist, or the guidance counselor are frequent choices for this position.

After studying the Rockin' Reader material, the coordinator will be able to ascertain how this program will fit the needs of children in the school.

Suggested Steps:

1. Explain the Rockin' Readers philosophy and program to faculty at a meeting at the school. Be sure that they understand that this program has high appeal to senior citizens and other community volunteers. Unlike parent volunteers, these community volunteers do not have a vested interest in the school; therefore, they will need to be reassured more often by teachers that their contribution is important to the school.
2. Ascertain which teachers want to participate in the program.
3. Explain to those teachers that the volunteers will come to the school for approximately one hour each week to read to two children (or perhaps three) within the hour. Each child will work *individually*, one-to-one, with the volunteer for approximately twenty minutes. The volunteer is to read to the same children each week. This way the volunteer has the opportunity to really make a difference in the life of the child, and both can feel good about the experience.

STEPS FOR PROGRAM SET-UP (CONTINUED)

4. Explain the criteria for student selection to participating teachers. Students chosen to work with a Rockin' Reader should be ones who test below their peer group in language development and reading readiness. In some cases, a Rockin' Reader might be placed with a child who could especially benefit from a one-to-one relationship with a caring adult to enhance his low self-esteem.
5. Once teachers have decided to use the program and at least some students have been selected, volunteers may be recruited. *(See section on recruiting.)*
6. Volunteers who want to be Rockin' Readers should be interviewed to assure that they are appropriate for the program. The application form can help the interviewer learn more about the volunteer.
7. Volunteers should then attend an orientation and training session. These training sessions may be given at the district level or at each school site. Since it is expected that volunteers will continue to join the program throughout the year, the coordinator may hold a general training session early in the year and then hold a smaller session for new volunteers once a month or as warranted. In larger districts, several district-wide trainings may be held early in the year, followed by school-based orientations by the school coordinator on an individual basis. *It is important that the school-based orientation include information on volunteer sign-in, parking, storage of valuables, restroom location, introduction to the media center, procedure for notification of absences, school calendar, and so on.*

STEPS FOR PROGRAM SET-UP (CONTINUED)

8. Volunteers and students are then matched by the school-based coordinator based on the volunteer's skills and abilities, grade preference, and available time. The coordinator should take the volunteer to the classroom, introduce him/her to the teacher, and arrange for the place where the volunteer will read. Following the first reading session, the coordinator should again touch base with the volunteer to check for questions and concerns . . . and to thank the volunteer.

9. Follow-up and support continue throughout the year. A critical step in the retention of volunteers, especially community volunteers, is ongoing support. This means occasionally checking with the volunteer to be sure things are going well.



School Volunteer Program

The District School Volunteer Program will:

- ❖ recruit, screen, and select volunteers to serve as readers in the program.
- ❖ provide periodic training opportunities for volunteers in the program.
- ❖ assist in securing rocking chairs for the Rockin' Readers.
- ❖ assist with recognition activities for program participants.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

School-Based Coordinator

The School-Based Coordinator will:

- ❖ articulate to the Head Start and primary grades teachers the goals of the program and explain criteria for student referrals.
- ❖ arrange for orientation and training of new Rockin' Reader volunteers at the school.
- ❖ coordinate the placement of volunteers with individual students.
- ❖ arrange for an appropriate reading location for the volunteer and students.
- ❖ arrange for recognition activities for volunteers.
- ❖ conduct program evaluation.

Classroom Teacher

The Classroom Teacher will:

- ❖ refer students to the program through the school-based coordinator.
- ❖ communicate with the volunteer prior to his/her first meeting with the child to give background on the student and provide general orientation.
- ❖ have children available at the time the volunteer is to read. Notify the volunteer if children will not be available on a particular day.

SELECTION CRITERIA FOR STUDENTS

Usually, the classroom teacher will designate which students in the class would benefit most from participation in the Rockin' Readers program. Although almost any child would profit from a one-to-one relationship with a volunteer, the Rockin' Readers project is designed to positively impact those children who test below their peer group in language development and pre-reading skills.

In certain cases, a child may be placed in the program because he particularly needs one-to-one attention from a caring adult to enhance his low self-esteem. It is important in this instance to let the volunteer know why the child was selected for the Rockin' Reader program.

The school-based coordinator needs to pay special attention to the appropriateness of each match between a volunteer and a child. For example, an older volunteer may not be able to handle a disruptive child; however, there may be another volunteer at the school who is just right for that child. Sensitivity to the background, needs, and expectations of the volunteer as well as knowledge of the child will assure a better working relationship.



RECRUITMENT IDEAS

It is relatively easy to recruit volunteers to serve as Rockin' Readers because reading stories to young children is such an enjoyable and rewarding activity. A project which takes only one hour a week, utilizes skills most volunteers already have, is non-threatening, and benefits children with special needs, attracts volunteers from all walks of life.

The following ideas may help with general recruitment:

- ❖ Word of mouth is the best way to recruit, so have your current Rockin' Readers recruit their friends.
- ❖ List the volunteer opportunity with the local Retired Senior Volunteer Program or Volunteer Center/Bureau. They will let potential volunteers know about the program and may include a recruitment piece in their newsletters.
- ❖ Briefly address meetings of any local service clubs, professional groups, church groups, or community organizations.
- ❖ Place signs or flyers in areas where senior citizens live.
- ❖ Put together a brochure and place it in the public library, newcomers' packets, and so on.
- ❖ Place announcements in church bulletins.
- ❖ Speak to your PTA, at back-to-school night, or at other parent meetings. Encourage parents to recruit other community members such as older neighbors who might enjoy this volunteer activity.
- ❖ Utilize the assistance of the school-based or district volunteer coordinator.
- ❖ Submit a story about Rockin' Readers to your local newspaper.

TRAINING GUIDELINES

The Rockin' Readers Handbook is the primary training tool for the project. This manual should be given to the volunteer either at a group training session or at an individual training session prior to placement with children in the school. It is best to review the manual with the volunteer. Although most volunteers will be comfortable with the idea of reading to small children, many will be concerned about selecting the appropriate books to read. It is recommended that in the initial training session you devote some time to giving advice and support regarding book selection.

Group training sessions or workshops provide an opportunity for volunteers to gain expertise in working with at-risk children, in book selection, and in reading presentation skills. Follow-up sessions provide volunteers with the opportunity to share success stories and concerns.

Ideas for Training Sessions

- ❖ Invite a media specialist to review various children's books. This could be done a couple of times a year.
- ❖ Have a primary specialist present a program on early childhood development, focusing on the at-risk child.
- ❖ Invite someone to speak on interesting and creative activities to utilize in a read-aloud session.
- ❖ Host a sharing session.

Most volunteers are attracted to the idea of meeting once a week with their children and do not want lots of other meetings. One or two trainings during the year should suffice.

RECOGNITION

When working with community volunteers, recognition is all the more important because these volunteers do not have a vested interest in the school. The school-based volunteer coordinator should have the name and address of each Rockin' Reader and include them in any school or district recognition events.

The most important way to provide recognition is through speaking to the volunteer at each session, asking about how things are going, and being sure that all those involved with the volunteer make an effort to express appreciation.

Other ways to provide recognition include:

- ❖ Have the children make a gift, picture, or card to thank the volunteer.
- ❖ Make a bookmark for the volunteer.
- ❖ Honor an outstanding volunteer by enlisting him or her to assist in recruiting and training other volunteers.
- ❖ Provide a "buddy system," matching one experienced volunteer with a new volunteer.
- ❖ Submit the nominations of outstanding Rockin' Readers to community, state, and national organizations for volunteer recognition.
- ❖ Provide ideas for feature stories on Rockin' Readers for school newsletters or the local paper.
- ❖ Have a special event such as an ice cream social for all the Rockin' Readers and their students. Let them all make their own sundaes. For entertainment, invite your media specialist to read aloud a particularly entertaining book.

TROUBLE- SHOOTING

Difficulties may be avoided by anticipating potential trouble areas and either correcting them or letting the volunteer know that the situation exists to avoid surprises.

In most schools, space is a definite problem—and an unsolvable one at that. The volunteer may be in an area with other people or with some other activities going on. Explain the unavailability of a quieter place to the volunteer, who will probably understand.

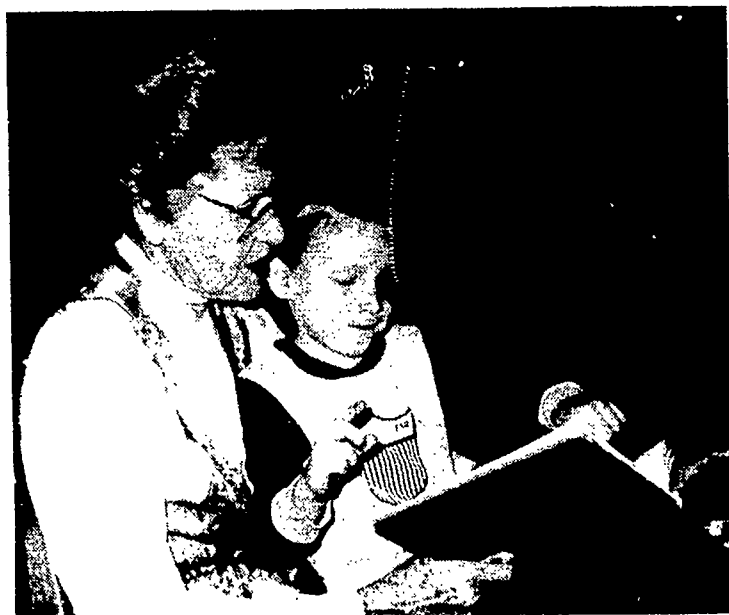
Another problem area arises when the volunteer comes and the children are in some special activity or on a field trip. Volunteers should be given a school calendar for the year and advised to mark their own calendars if their reading day falls on a holiday. In addition, teachers should give advance notice of special activities or field trips which interfere with the regularly scheduled read-aloud sessions.

Remember, rocking chairs are not always available; regular chairs are fine, as long as there is an adult-sized chair available for the reader.

The Rockin' Readers project needs to be evaluated annually at your school. An evaluation will help you find out if and how the program benefits the children involved. It will also allow you to see areas in need of improvement. Positive evaluations give you the opportunity to communicate to a volunteer his impact on a particular child.

Although most evaluations in a program of this nature are subjective, you may want to do pre-testing and post-testing of students involved in the program. However, in most cases, a brief questionnaire sent to teachers and another sent to the volunteers will give you the kind of feedback that you need.

PROGRAM EVALUATION



1. Bruce A. Lloyd, Ph.D., "Lapping is Loving," *Golden Years*, March/April, 1990, p. 42.

2. Richard C. Anderson, Eldrieda H. Hiebert, Judith A. Scott, and Ian A.F. Wilkinson, *Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading*. (Champaign-Urbana, IL, Center for the Study of Reading, 1985), p. 23.

3. Bernice E. Cullinan, "Literature for Young Children," in D.S. Strickland and L.M. Morrow (Eds.) *Emerging Literacy—Young Children Learn to Read and Write*. Newark, Delaware, IRA, 1989, pp. 35-51.

4. D. Durken, *Children Who Read Early*, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1966).

5. *Ibid.*,

6. Steven Silvern, "Parent Involvement in Reading Achievement: Research and Implications for Practice," *Childhood Education*, 1985, pp. 44-51, 62.

7. D. Holdaway, *The Foundation of Literacy*, (Sidney, Australia: Aston Scholastic, 1979).

8. Robert L. Thorndike, "Reading Comprehension Education in 15 Countries: An Empirical Study." Vol. 3, *International Studies in Education* (New York, Holstead Wiley, 1973).

9. Dorothy Cohen, "The Effect of Literature on Vocabulary and Reading Achievement." *Elementary English*. 1968, pp. 45, 209-213, 217.

10. Linda Lamme, *Raising Readers, A Guide to Sharing Literature with Young Children*, (New York: Walker Publishing, 1980).

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APPENDIX

On the following pages are sample forms, handouts, and drawings which have been developed in Alachua County. These may be copied or revised to fit your own program needs.

Rockin' Readers Registration

Name: _____

Address: _____

Zip Code: _____ Telephone: _____

How did you learn of this program? _____

Have you had experience reading aloud to young children? (as a parent, teacher, grandparent, and so on) _____

Preferred age of children with whom you will work:

_____ Pre-Kindergarten _____ Kindergarten _____ First Grade
_____ Second Grade _____ No Preference

Schools at which you prefer to work: _____

References: (Name, address, phone number):

1. _____

2. _____

Rockin' Readers Registration for Returning Volunteers

Name: _____

Address: _____

Zip Code: _____ Telephone: _____

I will _____ will not _____ be able to participate as a Rockin' Reader this year.

I would like to do a different volunteer job in the schools this year. ___Yes ___No

If yes, what would you like to do? _____

School at which you would like to work: _____

Preferred age of children with whom you will work:

_____ pre-kindergarten _____ kindergarten _____ first grade
_____ second grade _____ no preference

I prefer to work with _____ girls, _____ boys, _____ no preference.

Days and times you are available to work: _____

Number of individual children you would like to work with: _____

Do you want to work with the same children as last year? If yes, please give
their names and grades. _____

If you know of friends who might like to be Rockin' Readers, please list their
names and telephone numbers: _____

JOB TITLE

Rockin' Reader

ROCKIN' READERS JOB DESCRIPTION

SUPERVISOR

Classroom teacher or designated school-based coordinator.

OBJECTIVE

To assist young children in acquiring the skills needed for learning to read, to foster in them an appreciation of literature and a love for reading, and to help them develop self-esteem and emotional maturity through a nurturing relationship.

DUTIES

1. Meet with assigned students one-to-one and read selected stories to them.
2. Develop a friendly, supportive relationship with the student.

QUALIFICATIONS

Ability to work with small children. Cheerful and cooperative attitude. Ability to read to a child for a short period of time. Patience.

GRADE/AGE SERVED

Pre-Kindergarten through second grade.

TRAINING AVAILABLE

A training manual is available for all volunteers. Workshops will be held periodically with emphasis on such topics as early childhood development, book selection, and effective reading-aloud skills.

TIME

Weekly, for approximately one hour. More often if desired.

TEACHER GUIDELINES

The Rockin' Readers Project

Description: Selected students from Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 2 will meet weekly on an *individual basis* with an adult volunteer who will read stories to them in a caring and supportive manner. The volunteer will read to the *same* children each week providing the opportunity to develop a relationship and have a positive impact on each child.

Objective: The purpose of the Rockin' Readers project is to help young children acquire the skills needed for learning to read, to foster in them an appreciation of literature and a love for reading, and to help them develop self-esteem and emotional maturity through a nurturing relationship.

Role of the Classroom Teacher:

1. Refer students to the program through the designated Rockin' Readers coordinator at your school. Students appropriate for referral are those who are behind their peers in language development and reading readiness skills and those who can benefit from individual attention.
2. Try to communicate with the volunteer prior to the first meeting with the children to give background on the students and provide general orientation on working with children who are in your class (i.e., should they knock and ask for the child or just come in; what are some books the child might like). You may contact the volunteer by telephone or set up a personal meeting.
3. Have children available at the time the volunteer is to read. Notify the volunteer ahead of time if children will not be available on a particular day.
4. Assist in recognition of the volunteer. Volunteers are "paid" by thank you's and success.
5. Assist in evaluating the impact of the program on the child.

Teacher/Volunteer Conference Checklist

When you meet with your Rockin' Reader volunteer, please plan to discuss the following:

- _____ Day and time to work with the child.
- _____ Procedure for you and the volunteer to keep in touch (regular conferences, telephone, notes, informal meetings, etc.)
- _____ Plan for notifying volunteer ahead of time if the child will not be available.
- _____ Your own classroom policies, procedures, and rules which may be pertinent to this volunteer.
- _____ General orientation information about your school such as location of the restroom, water fountain, media center.
- _____ Pertinent background information about the children with whom the volunteer will work.
- _____ Special needs of the child which the volunteer might address.
- _____ Tips for working with each specific child.

To Discuss At Later Conferences:

- _____ Problems or successes either the teacher or the volunteer may be experiencing.
- _____ Additional materials or techniques the volunteer might use.

Rockin' Readers

Teacher Year-End Evaluation

Teacher's Name: _____ School: _____

Student's Name: _____ Volunteer's Name : _____

Please assess the impact the Rockin' Reader volunteer had on each child in your class who participated in the project. Rate from 1 (low) to 5 (high) the influence that volunteer had on each student in the following areas:

| | Low | | | | High |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Skill Development: | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Enhanced Self-Esteem: | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Improved Behavior: | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Interest in Reading: | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| General Knowledge: | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Do you feel the project was worthwhile for the student?

Did the child appear to enjoy his/her reading time with the Rockin' Reader?

What changes would you make to improve the program?

Additional Comments: _____

Rockin' Readers

Volunteer Year-End Evaluation

Volunteer's Name: _____

School: _____

Number of children read to each week: _____

Grade: _____ Pre-Kindergarten _____ Kindergarten _____ First _____ Second

1. Did you enjoy your volunteer time as a Rockin' Reader?

2. What did you enjoy most?

3. What did you enjoy the least?

4. Approximately how many times did you go to the school to read this school year?

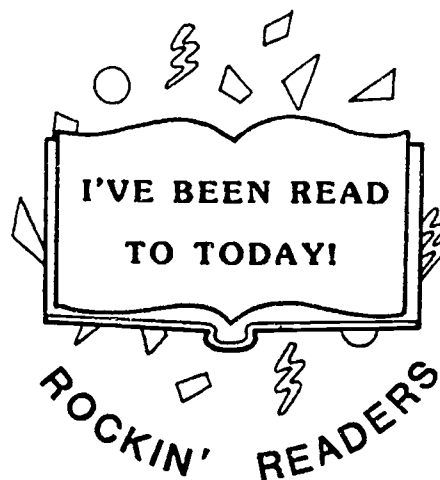
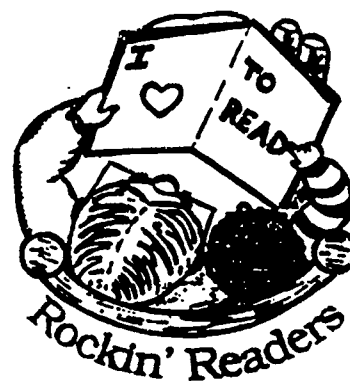
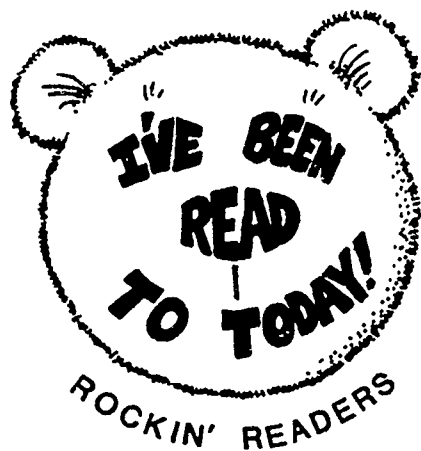
5. At a volunteer, were you well received at the school?

6. What changes, if any, would you make in this program?

7. Would you like to volunteer as a Rockin' Reader next year?

8. Additional comments/experiences to share:

Camera-Ready Logos and Artwork



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